

THE SOWDOWN OF BABYLOYNE:
A DESCRIPTION OF THE MANUSCRIPT

DATE AND PROVENANCE

The Middle English romance *The Sowdown of Babyloyne* is extant in a unique manuscript, Garrett Collection of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts No. 140, Princeton University Library.¹ De Ricci and Guddat-Figge agree in giving *c.* 1450 as the approximate date of production for the manuscript. From the inscriptions on the front fly-leaf (see fig. 1 below), the more recent ownership history of this codex becomes retraceable. After the death of Rev. Dr. Richard Farmer (1735-1797),² the book's first known owner,³ it was purchased by George Steevens (1736-1800)⁴ at the book sale

I would like to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to the Spanish Association for Anglo-American Studies for a Patricia Shaw research grant that made my visit to Princeton possible, and to Don C. Skemer, curator of manuscripts at Princeton University Library, for assisting me in the examination of Garrett MS 140.

¹ Other descriptions of this manuscript are in Seymour de Ricci, *Census of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the United States and Canada*, with the assistance of W.J. Wilson (New York: Wilson Company, 1935), 1:893, and Gisela Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1976), 301–2; Guddat-Figge had access only to a microfilm, which hindered her description (cf. *loc. cit.*, n. 1). See also *The Phillipps Manuscripts. Catalogus Librorum Manuscriptorum in Bibliotheca D. Thomæ Phillipps, Bt.*, with an introduction by A.N.L. Munby (London: Holland Press, 1968), p. 129, no. 8357, and *Catalogue of the Literature and History of the British Islands*, part I, Bernard Quaritch no. 193 (London, October 1899), p. 25, no. 85.

² On Dr. Farmer, see Seymour de Ricci, *English Collectors of Books & Manuscripts (1530-1930) and Their Marks of Ownership*, Sandars Lectures 1929–30 (Cambridge: University Press, 1930), 58, and William Younger Fletcher, *English Book Collectors* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1902), 235–37.

³ Fol. 41v contains the following inscription by an unidentified 16th century owner: “This is John Eteyes boke, witnes by John staff” (quoted in Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue of MSS*, p. 301; see also de Ricci, *Census*, 1:893).

of 15 June 1798 for £1. 10s, after the priced copy of the catalogue in Cambridge University Library (CUL).⁵ Afterwards, the book was bought for £3. 4s (CUL marked copy) by Octavius Graham Gilchrist (1779-1823)⁶ at the sale of the Bibliotheca Steevensiana on 20 May 1800.⁷ The next owner of this manuscript was the great book collector Richard Heber (1774-1833),⁸ who obtained it for £35. 10s (CUL) in 1824 after the dissolution of Gilchrist's library.⁹ Next the book was sold to the famed bibliophile Sir Thomas Phillipps (1792-1872),¹⁰ who bought it at the sale of the Bibliotheca

⁴ On Steevens, see de Ricci, *English Collectors*, 62–63, and Fletcher, *English Book Collectors*, 240–44.

⁵ *Bibliotheca Farmeriana. A Catalogue of the Curious, Valuable and Extensive Library in Print and Manuscript of the Late Rev. Richard Farmer, D.D.* [1798], p. 370, lot 8085; the manuscript is described as follows: 'Romance of the Sowdon of Babylanne, in Verse, on vellum. See MS. Note, by Ritson'. The exact date of purchase is taken from the inscription on the manuscript (see fig. 1). For copies of this and other sale catalogues, see A. N. L. Munby and Lenore Coral, *British Book Sale Catalogues 1676-1800: A Union List* (London: Mansell, 1977).

⁶ On Gilchrist, see *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Leslie Stephen (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1890), 21: 344.

⁷ *Bibliotheca Steevensiana. A Catalogue of the Curious and Valuable Library of George Steevens, Esq.* (started on May 13, 1800), p. 76, lot 1203. The exact date of purchase is taken from the inscription on the manuscript (see fig. 1). The description reads: 'The Metrical Romauce of the SOWDON OF BABYLONE, and of Ferumbras his Son, who conquered Rome, and Kinge Charles of Fraunce, with XII. dosey Peres toke the Sowdon in the Feelde, and smote of his Heede, MS. on vellum'.

⁸ On Heber and his library, see Arnold Hunt, "Bibliotheca Heberiana," in *Antiquaries, Book Collectors and the Circles of Learning*, ed. Robin Myers and Michael Harris, 83–112 (Winchester: St Paul's Bibliographies, 1996).

⁹ *Catalogue of the Valuable Library of the Late Octavius Gilchrist, Esq.* sold by auction by Mr. Evans (1824), p. 37, lot 1112. The description reads: 'THE ROMANCE OF THE SOWDON OF BABYLONE, and of Ferumbras his Sone who conquered Rome, and King Charles of Fraunce, with XII dosy Peres, toke the Sowden in the Feelde and Smote of His Heede. MANUSCRIPT'. The catalogue entry adds the following note: 'It is written upon parchment, and is of considerable antiquity. The Sowdon of Babylon, and his Son Ferumbras formerly enjoyed a high reputation among the Lovers of Legendary Lore. Mr. Ritson (in a manuscript note at the beginning of the volume), traces an allusion to this Romance in the Metrical History of Bruce; and Mr. Gilchrist refers to one in the works of Sir David Lyndsay, and thinks it is designated in the Romance of Richard Cœur de Lion. There is a plain allusion to it in Skelton's "Ware the Hawke". This UNPUBLISHED METRICAL ROMANCE is highly deserving the attention of Collectors of early English Poetry.'

¹⁰ On Phillipps, see de Ricci, *English Collectors of Books*, 118–30, and A. N. L. Munby, *Portrait of an Obsession: The life of Sir Thomas Phillipps, the world's greatest book collector* (New York: Putnam, 1967).

Heberiana started on 10 February 1836.¹¹ After the dispersal of Phillipps's extensive collection, the manuscript was sold by auction to Quaritch, the renowned antiquarian firm,¹² for £60 in 1898.¹³ The volume was advertised in Quaritch's catalogues of 1898, 1899, and 1902 at the published price of £80,¹⁴ and eventually sold in 1905 to Robert Garrett (1875-1961).¹⁵ In 1942 Garrett donated to Princeton University Library 171 western manuscripts of his private collection, including that of *The Sowdown*.¹⁶ (see figure 1)

¹¹ *Bibliotheca Heberiana. Catalogue of the Library of the Late Richard Heber, Esq.*, part xi (1836), p. 162, lot 1533. The description follows closely that of the catalogue of Gilchrist's sale.

¹² On Quaritch's firm, see the Special Number for the 150th Anniversary of Bernard Quaritch, ed. by Richard Linenthal, *The Book Collector* 46 (1997), and de Ricci, *English Collectors of Books*, 158–68.

¹³ *Bibliotheca Phillippica. Catalogue of a Further Portion of the Famous Collection ... of the Late Sir Thomas Phillipps, Bart.*, by Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge (1898), p. 127, lot 976. The description reads: 'ROMANCE THE SOWDON OF BABYLOYNE, AN ANCIENT METRICAL ROMANCE IN OLD ENGLISH, *manuscript, written in the fifteenth century*, ON VELLUM *folio*. XV CENT.' I quote the price that appears on the marked copy in *CUL* of the *Catalogus Librorum Manuscriptorum in Bibliotheca D. Thomæ Phillipps, BT.*, entry 8357/1533.

¹⁴ See *Catalogue of Rare & Valuable Books and Choice Illuminated Manuscripts from the Libraries of the Late Earl of Ashburnham, the Wilbraham Family, Sir Thomas Phillipps and the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Morley*, Bernard Quaritch no. 180 (London, July 1898), p. 7, no. 15. The description reads, 'FIERABRAS. ENGLISH METRICAL ROMANCE OF THE SOWDON OF BABYLOYNE ... Small folio, MS. ON VELLUM, 41 leaves, 42 lines to the page ... About 1450'; *Catalogue of the Literature and History of the British Islands*, part I, Bernard Quaritch no. 193 (London, October 1899), p. 25, no. 85, which adds the following information: 'Said to be the UNIQUE COPY of the work of an English poet in the time of Henry VI, beautifully written in a cursive hand and apparently complete with the exception of parts of a few lines on the second last page'; and *A Catalogue of Ancient, Illuminated, & Liturgical Manuscripts Ranging from the VIIth to the XVIIIth Century*, Bernard Quaritch no. 211 (London, January 1902), p. 50, no. 101.

¹⁵ On Garrett, see Donald C. Dickinson, *Dictionary of American Book Collectors* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 133–34, and Garrett's "Recollections of a Collector," *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 10 (1949): 103–16.

¹⁶ See Harold Dodds, "Acceptance of the Collection by President Dodds," *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 3 (1942): 113–14; Donald Drew Egbert, "The Western European Manuscripts," *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 3 (1942): 123–30, esp. 129; C. U. Faye and W. H. Bond, *Supplement to the Census of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the United States and Canada* (New York: Bibliographical Society of America, 1962), 310.

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The Garrett manuscript contains only the single copy of the romance known as *The Sowdown of Babyloyne* (IMEV 950.1),¹⁷ composed c. 1400,¹⁸ and copied in an East Midland dialect.¹⁹ *The Sowdown* is a translation of the original of the Anglo-Norman version that appears in British Library, Egerton MS 3028,²⁰ and was edited for the first time by the Roxburghe Club in 1854.²¹

MATERIAL

It is a vellum manuscript measuring 275 mm by 203 mm, consisting of 41 leaves,²² and with the following collation: 1¹⁰ (fols. 1-10), 2⁶ (fols. 11-16), 3¹⁰ (fols. 17-26), 4⁶ (fols. 27-32), 5¹⁰⁻¹ (fols. 33-41).²³ There is slight ruling (see figs. 2 and 3 below) that marks the left corners of the writing block of 266 mm high (between 39-43 lines) indented approximately 45 mm from the

¹⁷ See Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins, *The Index of Middle English Verse* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1943); Rossell Hope Robbins and John L. Cutler, *Supplement to the Index of Middle English Verse* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1965); Richard Hamer, *A Manuscript Index to the Index of Middle English Verse* (London: The British Library, 1995). A transcript of the manuscript by George Steevens is now in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce MS 175. See also H. M. Smyser, "Charlemagne Legends," in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*, ed. J. Burke Severs, 1:82-84 (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967). For a brief literary description, see W. R. J. Barron, *English Medieval Romance* (London: Longman, 1987), 99-103.

¹⁸ See Emil Hausknecht, ed., *The Romaunce of the Sowdone of Babylone and of Ferumbras*, EETS ES 38 (London: Trübner, 1881), xlv-xlvii.

¹⁹ See Hausknecht, ed., *The Sowdone*, xxxiv-xl.

²⁰ See H. M. Smyser, "A New MS of the *Destruction de Rome* and *Fierabras*," *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* 14 (1932): 339-49, and "The Sowdon of Babylon and Its Author," *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* 13 (1931): 185-218.

²¹ Apart from Hausknecht's edition for EETS, the romance has also been edited by Alan Lupack in *Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances*, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1990), 1-103. Extracts of the romance appear in *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances*, ed. George Ellis, 2nd ed. (London, 1811), 2:369-419, and in *Middle English Metrical Romances*, ed. W. H. French and C. B. Hale (New York: Prentice Hall, 1930), 239-84.

²² The book is paginated in ink and the current curator has added foliation in pencil.

²³ Note that, to my knowledge, the statement of collation of this manuscript is not provided in any previous publication.

left margin, always in single columns. It is in good condition, and the text is complete and clearly legible, despite that margins have been cut off for fols. 2-4, 8-10, 13, 25-26, 34, 36, 38-40, wormholes have affected the last 18 leaves, and some signs of humidity are visible. The text is written in brownish ink except for line 370 (fol. 5r), copied by a later hand in black ink (see fig. 2 below, line 4). It was bound in English half-calf *c.* 1790,²⁴ and on the spine it reads, “THE ROMAUNCE OF THE [...]DON OF BABYLONE / MS”.

SCRIPT

Here I describe the morphology of the scribe’s hand (hybrid secretary book-hand, mid-15th c.):²⁵ secretary single compartment *a* (“what”; fig. 3, l. 6); uncial *d* is predominant (“affrayned”; fig. 3, l. 5) with occasional examples of looped anglicana *d* (“Roulande”; fig. 3, l. 8); uncial *e* is preferred (“telle”; fig. 3, l. 1), but cursive reversed form of *e* is sparingly adopted (“the”; fig. 2, l. 2); double-compartment anglicana form of *g* (“kinge”; fig. 3, l. 10); the ascender of *h* is always looped, with otiose stroke in medial position (“brought”; fig. 3, l. 3), and with looped limb when ligatured (“myschaunce”; fig. 3, l. 11); the ascender of *l* always turns into a loop (“Olyvere”; fig. 3, l. 2); two forms of *r* are used: right-shouldered and 2-shaped *r* (“prisoneres”; fig. 3, l. 12); *s* is represented in three forms: long *s* in initial and medial position (“spake”; fig. 2, l. 1; “myschaunce”; fig. 3, l. 11), anglicana sigma *s* mainly in final position (“names”; fig. 3, l. 6; but cf. “saide”; fig. 3, l. 7), short *B*-shaped *s* in final position (“wos”; fig. 3, l. 2); simple secretary form of *w* resembling a double *v* (“were”; fig. 3, l. 6) and anglicana *w* similar to one looped *l* and one looped *b* (“worthy”; fig. 3, l. 2).

DECORATION

This manuscript is a plain volume with decoration limited to the use of special display script for the *explicit* (fol. 41r) and to the flourishing of a

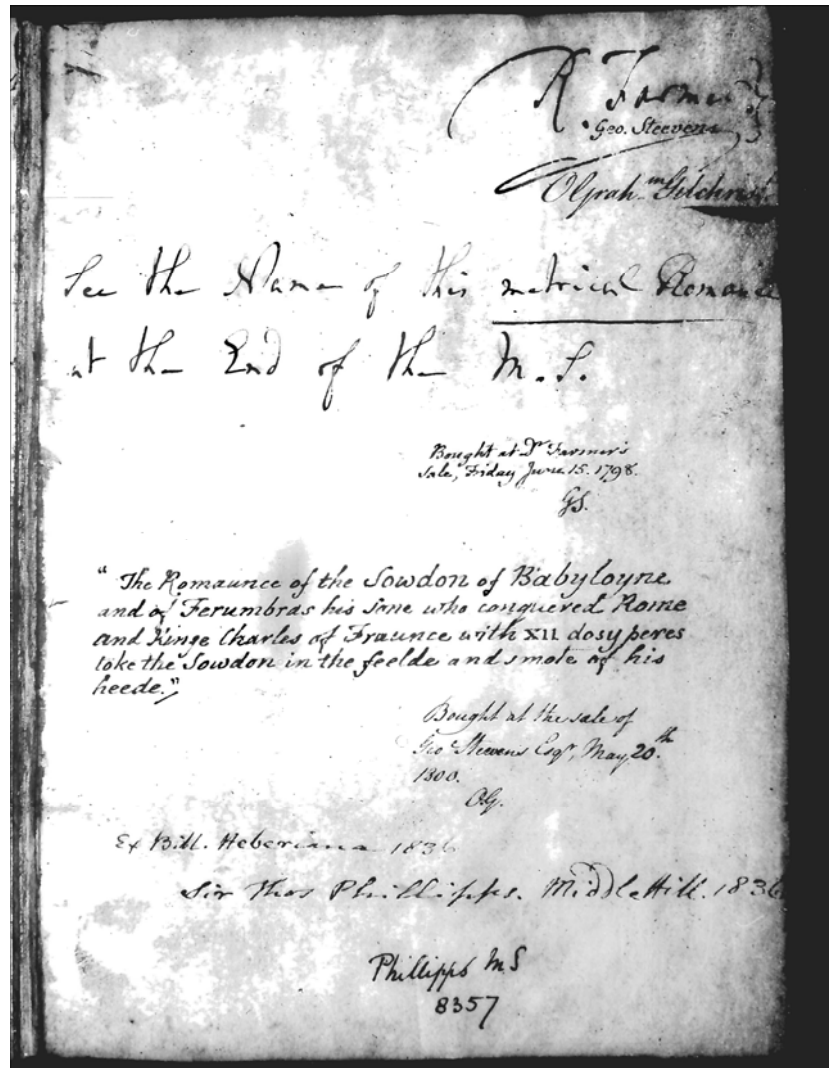
²⁴ See de Ricci, *Census*, 1:893.

²⁵ Guddat-Figge describes it as ‘clear Secretary’ (*Catalogue of MSS*, 301). For this description I follow the terminology in M. B. Parkes, *English Cursive Book Hands, 1250-1500* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) and Anthony G. Petti, *English Literary Hands from Chaucer to Dryden* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1977).

letter in the first line of some pages (cf. “Roulande”; fig. 3, l. 1). The scribe did, however, make allowances for the later possible inclusion of three-line initials, with guide letters visible on the following folios: 5v, 7v, 8r, 9r, 12r, 13v, 19r (see fig. 3 above), 21r, 21v, 22r, 34v, 35r; there are two exceptions: the six-line opening capital on fol. 1 and a two-line initial on fol. 30v. Although these capitals were never executed, three of them were outlined: *B* in brown ink (fol. 5v), and *N* (fol. 7v) and *S* (fol. 8r) in pencil.

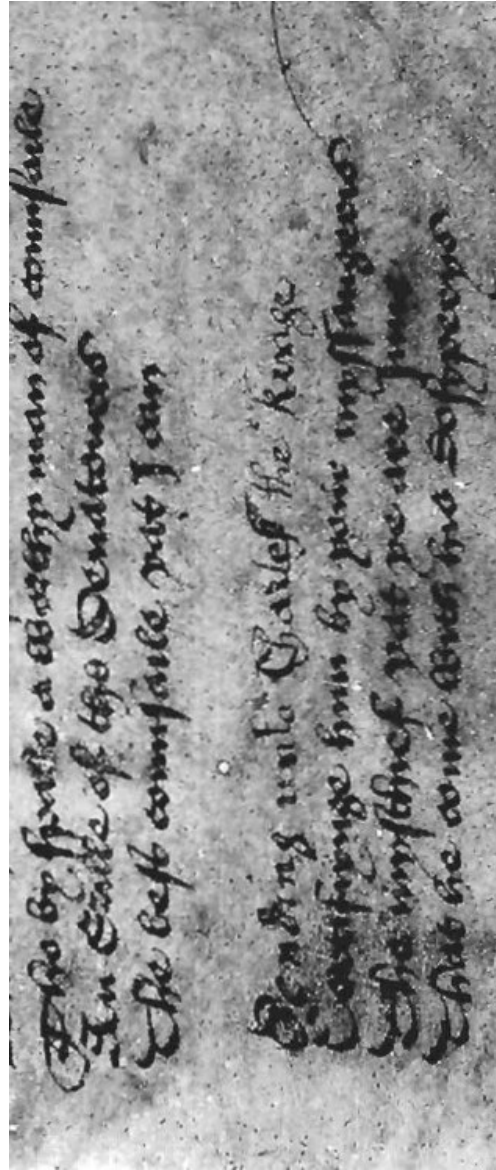
Jordi Sánchez-Martí
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FIGURE 1. GARRETT MS 140, FRONT FLY-LEAF²⁶



²⁶ All facsimiles from the manuscript are reproduced with the permission of Princeton University Library.

FIGURE 2. GARRETT MS 140 FOL. 5R



Who by spelle a worthy man of counsaile
In Exile of the Denatowens
The best counsaile, but I can
Bending unto Charles the Kinge
To aspyre him by your myffangeons
Who myffthief, but he are June
That he come thus his Doffreye

FIGURE 3. GARRETT MS 140 FOL. 19R

These for to tell of Yonlande
And of Olymere that worthy King
howe than here brought to y^e succour
By the King of Soldan
The Soldan fore hem assigned
What not here names were
Yonland ande and noight assigned
Oys Yonlande and five Olymere
Necessaries to King Charles of France
That worthy King and Emperour
That names are taken by myght
So be profumers here in thy tence